

## **Dance Department History Project 2010-2011**

### **Transcribed interview of Jiamin Huang in October 2010**

**Interviewed by Susanne Johnson Davis**

My name is Jiamin Huang. Originally, I came from Beijing, China. I was a student at the Beijing Dance Academy from 1980 to 1984. I got my bachelor's degree in dance education and then I was invited to be a full-time dance faculty at this wonderful dance academy. In 1996, I followed my husband and moved to the United States. He was a student at BYU too. He got his PhD from the physical education department at the same time I got my master's degree emphasizing in performance and choreography from 1996 to 1998. Then I was a part-time faculty member for almost a year in the BYU dance department. In 2006, I was so lucky to become a full-time faculty member in this wonderful department.

I have received several questions, and I would love to answer some of them. I think I'd like to start at number five: what I remember as a student at BYU. The first impression that I got was that the teaching philosophy was very different from China: teacher-centered vs. student-centered. It was more emphasized on creative ideas, self-expression, critical thinking, and all around character building for students who started at BYU.

The two slogans of our university, "The world is our campus," and "Enter to learn, go forth to serve," still leave a great impression on me. I feel that all of our educational goals really reflect this philosophy. I also remember when I was a student, I was so moved by most of my peers and professors who showed such kindness to me—this harmonious relationship created a wonderful atmosphere that shows what our church was about.

Why did I choose BYU? What were my dreams? Where they fulfilled? I believe there is a special reason for me to be here at BYU. No one chooses by accident. I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to have a key role in linking my colleagues and students here at BYU with Chinese arts educators and students from numerous universities in China. I devote much time and energy to this role.

One of the main events related to cultural exchange is the Chinese arts education workshop which began in 2003. Since that time, the college of Health and Human Performance, the College of Fine Arts, the McKay School of Education, Performing Arts Management, and KBYU-TV have worked in conjunction with Chinese leadership to organize the arts education workshop. As one of the main advocates and organizers of these activities, I have taken on the responsibilities of mentoring and evaluating the entire workshop course. Over the span of the last eight years, 93 dance educators from 28 universities and 27 dance institutes in China have participated in over 45 different courses and events led by more than 60 BYU professors and administrators from different departments.

The other one is the China Study Abroad program, which students to study in China for seven weeks. Since its inception, four groups with a total of 91 students have visited 10 Chinese cities and 20 dance and arts schools. Much appreciation is felt towards those students that co-operated in these academic pursuits, preparing many culture exchange events and opportunities for us in our time here. They are as follows: the Beijing Dance Academy, Beijing Children Dance Center, the College of Dance, China Central Minority University, Beijing Children Activity Center, Beijing University of Physical Education, Hong Kong Performing Arts Academy, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Shanghai Dance School, Shanghai Normal University, the Dance Department of the Shanghai Conservatory of

Music, and the College of Fine Arts. There are so many schools that help us send our group to study in China. I just feel I do not have time to read them all.

I have received so much positive feedback from BYU students who have participated in the China Dance Study Abroad Program. We came as friends and left as family. These comments came from the third group: "Almost everyone felt the China dance study abroad program was a lifetime of unforgettable experiences that not only opened their minds, but their eyes and changed their attitude about another culture, and was also a great influence for their future life."

What has changed in the field over time? Globalization and high technology have changed our view of dance education. I have been studying theory and practice of inter-culture communication, and I presented research papers in the national dance conference in October 2010. That just barely happened a couple of weeks ago. This research paper was based on the Chinese study abroad program. I believe that intercultural exchange involves evolution from strangers to familiarity, from familiarity to appreciation, from appreciation to insight, and finally from insight to creation. These processes do not occur with external support, to guide its course of systematic progression is critical as a student attempting to undergo this transformation. My research studies the design and implementation of the Chinese study abroad program to determine whether it achieves its stated purpose of enhancing students' ability to understand and appreciate the skills of inter-cultural communication for life-long enrichment.

Along with culture exchange events, I also have done several other good things for our faculty members and also our students. The first one: I introduced faculty members to teach or observe international dance competitions in China. Since 1998, the first group visited China and attended a dance competition in Guang-jo. We have a total of fifteen individuals that visit China and give lectures or maybe two weeks dance training in China in many different schools. They have a beautiful reputation for BYU and very good praise from all faculty members and students they have taught and shared our culture with. In return, we accept many key teachers from China in different schools for their dance program. So far we have accepted seventeen young teachers from many universities and colleges to study in the dance department at BYU. They did their research in their dance department and studied for one or two semesters.

Another thing I want to mention: I feel it is a good thing to add to our courses for our students; for example, the Chinese contemporary dance class I taught at BYU for almost twelve years. I got a lot of good feedback from students, and the students got a benefit from this. I combined the Chinese professional way of dance to the Western teaching philosophy. Combining them is not technically all movements, teaching methods, and philosophy. I think I used both strong points to guide my students to reach the level I wanted them to reach.

Another course I created is an international ethnic class which was called Dance 273. I taught a Chinese section to introduce Chinese folk dance to BYU students. I feel very good about this course because I can share my culture and let students see how dance reflects culture, and that even though we live in a different area, we share the same common principles for dance and also how we really value the role dance plays in our life. So I feel this was a very good experience to share my culture with BYU students. Also I have been involved in choreographing numerous dances for the international folk dance group ensemble and dance ensemble for contemporary dance division, contemporary dance theatre, and children's dance program. I feel this is a wonderful opportunity for me to have new pieces from my own perspective to combine the two cultures together. I felt good about it.

I really want to share what I got from BYU. There were so many blessings I received from this wonderful place; like I mentioned before, nothing here at BYU is an accident. I received so many wonderful things from the university, the college, the department, and all of my colleagues and students. I feel so blessed to work here.

The first person I want to appreciate is Dr. Capson. She opened a door to me and gave me such deep understanding and unforgettable supportiveness. I never forgot her help and the example she set for me to follow.

The second person I want to appreciate is Sister Sara Lee Gibb. She really helped me to believe in myself and I have more confidence to overcome a lot of the difficulties to pursue my dreams. She showed that potential and opportunity to me. She gave me a lot of opportunities to prove myself. Without her help, I don't think many culture exchange events would have been built up together. She always read my mind and really pushed me to my limitation and said, "Yes Jiamin, you can do it!" I feel without her help, I wouldn't have reached so many successful things.

I want to appreciate my dance committee chair, Susanne Davis. She was my committee chair when I graduated from BYU. She has sharp eyes to see what I could do and helped me to change lots of mistakes from my writing, and helped me correct grammar, spelling, and even ideas. I learned a lot from that process. She also helped me create a new course and helped me to add to the course material which I wrote a long time ago, the first time I asked to teach this class. She was that person to help to audit the teaching material and course material, which is 90 pages of material. It is long!

I feel like this place is my second home. I receive a lot of wonderful spiritual support from our church, from our working place. Not only academically, but spiritually, I have become more strong, more powerful, to see what I needed to pursue and to see the true meaning in my life: how to be a good person in this life and how to prepare myself to return to Heavenly Father and live with him forever. I'm so happy for all the things I have received here: my colleagues, my friends that are like my sisters and brothers, who understand and really support me. Again, I want to say how lucky I am.